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Some officials believe Assad has leukemia

WASHINGTON — Intelligence officials said Thursday they believe Syrian President Hafez Assad is suffering from leukemia, based on observations during Assad's visit to Jordan last month.

During the visit, foreign reporters and members of the diplomatic community observed the Syrian leader, triggering the new intelligence reports he is suffering from leukemia, one diplomatic source said.

The source said the Syrian leader's health, plus a continuing struggle within his country among apparent successors, may explain the recent movement of some Syrian military units closer to the Israeli border.

The source said Assad may be using the military preparations to distract his inner circle from any evidence that his grip on the leadership may be weakening.